

Classroom Civility

Classroom Incivility: Defined

Uncivil behaviors are annoying, rude or disruptive and can be mild or more severe. Here are some examples:

- Arriving late or leaving early
- Talking on a cell phone or text messaging
- Carrying on side conversations with other students
- Sleeping
- Doing other coursework or reading a magazine
- Packing up noisily before the end of class
- Speaking rudely or forcefully to other students
- Speaking rudely or forcefully to the instructor, questioning the instructor's authority, expressing anger about a grade, or generally disrupting the instructor's ability to teach
- Dominating the class discussion by not allowing other students to speak
- Verbal threats
- Physical violence

Disruptive behaviors are those that cause you concern as an instructor and prevent you from being able to effectively perform your duties. Preventing such behaviors is the best way to maintain the civility of your classroom.

You may want to take some time during the first class meeting to set the tone of the class by identifying students' rights and responsibilities and letting students know your expectations regarding behavior. This might include:

- Eating, talking, sleeping, reading, chewing gum, wearing hats, or anything you deem important
- How to address you as the instructor
- How to be recognized in class
- Negotiable items such as breaks
- Attendance and punctuality

You may choose to let the students set the ground rules or at least participate in the discussion of ground rules.

Encouraging Civility

- Clarify expectations by including a statement on syllabus describing expected behavior in your classroom.
- Provide students with a copy of the "Standards of Student Conduct."
- Start and end class on time.
- Establish a method for students to air their grievances.
- Treat students with respect by avoiding sarcasm, talking down to them, and making judgments about them based on their appearance.
- Decrease anonymity by learning students' names.
- Encourage active learning.

Handling Challenges to Your Authority

- Project confidence by projecting your voice, dressing appropriately, using large gestures, and moving frequently around the room. (The more you show your authority, the less likely students are to challenge it.)
- Don't get emotional; explain your objectives rather than defend them
- If a student attempts to engage in a prolonged discussion on your knowledge of the subject or your ability to teach, end the conversation. Tell the student that the classroom is not an appropriate place to discuss this and offer to speak with him or her after class.
- If a student expresses something you feel is a grievance that might affect other students, have a class discussion about it, inviting others to weigh in.
- If you are feeling pressured to change your mind due to a student or students' complaints, tell them you need time to think about it and will discuss it with them in the near future.
- If you are meeting privately with an aggrieved student, let the student express his or her point of view without interruption. Explain your policies but don't get into a long defense.